Walpole Cross Keys Neighbourhood Development Plan Review

Examination Arrangements

Purpose of this Note

This Note sets out the basis on which the examination of the neighbourhood plan will be undertaken. Its ambitions are two-fold:

- to comply with the NPIERS Guidance for service users and examiners (April 2018); and
- to provide guidance for the Parish Council on the key stages of the examination.

The examination route map

Different examinations raise their own issues. Nevertheless, the examination of the review of the Walpole Cross Keys Neighbourhood Plan will have the following the key stages:

Stage 1: Background Reading

This involves reading the submitted Plan, its supporting documents, and the various representations. I will take all this information into account when preparing my report.

This stage of the examination will start next week.

Stage 2: Visit to the neighbourhood area

The visit will provide me with an opportunity to look at specific issues and locations in the neighbourhood area. Plainly not every component of the Plan needs to be viewed on the visit. Nevertheless, it will be focused on the issues that have arisen either from the background reading and/or which are fundamental to the review of the Plan.

The visit will be unaccompanied. I will not meet with representatives of the Parish Council, the Borough Council, or any of the parties who have commented on the Plan.

I will visit the neighbourhood area in the week beginning 19 January 2026.

Stage 3: Clarification Note

I will send a clarification note shortly after the visit. It will raise a series of questions for the Parish Council on the submitted Plan. The answers to the questions will help me to understand the Plan better and, where necessary, to recommend modifications to ensure it meets the basic conditions. The Note will also provide an opportunity for the Parish Council to respond to the representations received on the Plan.

The clarification note will suggest a timescale for responses. However, this is a matter which I am happy should proceed at whatever pace is determined locally. This acknowledges that work on neighbourhood plans is carried out by local councils and individuals on a voluntary basis.

Stage 4: Decision about the need for a hearing

The combination of the background reading, the unaccompanied visit and the responses to the clarification note will allow me to come to a view about the need or otherwise for a hearing as part of the examination process. The legislation anticipates that most examinations can proceed by way of written representations and without a hearing.

If a hearing is required, the Borough Council will make the necessary arrangements.

Stage 5: The Examination Report

The report will be prepared throughout the examination period. Its general parts can be written early in the process. The elements of the report that overlap with the clarification note will not be prepared until the responses to the note are received. These arrangements would also apply if a hearing was required.

I will prepare a fact-check report before the final report. This will give an opportunity for the Parish Council and the Borough Council to comment on any factual inaccuracies and/or omissions within the report. It will not present an opportunity for the examination to enter another phase.

Other related matters

The timing of the examination

Plainly different plans cover different issues. Neighbourhood plan examinations are inevitably linear and are directly affected by the number of policies and the number and complexity of the representations received.

In the case of the review of the Walpole Cross Keys Plan, I anticipate being able to send the fact -heck report in early-March 2026. The exact timing will be influenced by the responses to the clarification note and/or the organisation of any required hearing.

Documents

I have asked the Borough Council to display all examination-related documents on its website.

Contact arrangements

My principal contact for the examination will be Sandra Homkenco at the Borough Council. In most cases, I will ask Sandra to send documents to the Parish Council on my behalf.

Andrew Ashcroft

Independent Examiner

Walpole Cross Keys Neighbourhood Development Plan Review

9 January 2026